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ABSTRACT

A project explored the process by which recruiters used information to make decisions on whom to interview. Data were collected from recruiters seeking candidates in electrical engineering, computer science, business, accounting, and social sciences/liberal arts, including communications. Recruiters relied heavily on major grade point average (GPA) and communication skills to determine whether candidates should be selected for an interview. The two factors used least often were sex of applicant and course content. The gender variables did not appear to influence the recruiters' decisions significantly. When comparing the characteristics recruiters reported using and the characteristics they actually used, recruiters believed they were using a wide variety of factors with relatively equal weights. In actuality, they primarily relied on major GPA and communication skills when making decisions. Business recruiters tended to have the best match between what they reported using and what they actually used. Recruiter experience did not provide any useful insights into the recruiter's ability to use factors in a fair and reliable manner across applicants. (YLB)

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Screening Job Applicants: Recruiter Decision Strategies

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Executive Summary

The Recruiter Decision Strategy project explored the process by which recruiters used information to make decisions on who to interview. Data were collected from recruiters seeking candidates in electrical engineering, computer science, business (marketing, merchandising, and general business), accounting, and social sciences/liberal arts, including communications. The following are the study's most interesting findings.

Recruiters relied heavily on major grade point average (GPA) and communication skills to determine whether candidates should be selected for an interview. The two factors used least often by recruiters were sex of applicant and course content.

The influences of gender, both of the applicants and the of the recruiters, was closely examined because of the legalities of the hiring process. The gender variables did not appear to influence significantly the recruiters' decisions. There was some evidence that some recruiters preferred one sex over the other. In accounting, for instance, women recruiters favored women applicants while in computer science and business male recruiters displayed a slight tendency to rate male applicants higher. With no strong statistical relationships involving gender, sex was not very important for this group of recruiters.

Differences were found in factor usage when recruiters were analyzed by academic major. Even though major GPA and communication skills were consistantly rated as the top two characteristics by all groups, the relative weights varied across majors. Recruiters seeking accountants and computer scientists used grades almost exclusively as their selection characteristic. Recruiters interested in business and social sciences/liberal arts majors placed more emphasis on communication skills than on GPA. Electrical engineering recruiters displayed a better balance among factors with grades being slightly more important than the other characteristics.

When comparing the characteristics recruiters <u>reported</u> using and the characteristics they <u>actually</u> used, recruiters believed they were using a wide variety of factors with relatively equal weights. In actuality, they primarily relied on major GPA and communication skills when making decisions. Business recruiters tended to have the best match between what they reported using and what they actually used.

Recruiter experience did not provide any useful insights into the recruiter's ability to use factors in a fair and reliable manner across applicants. The variable for training, used as a descriptor of the hours of training a recruiter has

received in recruiting/interviewing techniques, provided only confusing results and raised new questions on the content of training programs available to recruiters.

This study's findings have several implications. Employers continue to assert that they are interested in a total person. Yet, recruiters may be focusing on only a few dimensions of a person during pre-screening process. Organizations may want to consider an evaluation of their recruiter training programs, so recruiters can develop more comprehensive selection methods.

Students preparing as early as their junior year for the transition from college to work will key on the cues sent by recruiters. To maintain grades, students may take fewer classes per term, avoid rigorous courses, and become less involved in extra-curricular activities. Students would benefit from knowledge about alternative job search strategies, learned earlier in their college experience, that would allow them to accentuate their best skills. College placement offices could assist by offering career development programs and job search workshops that are targeted to sophomores and juniors. Programs could focus on sharpening learning and personal skills that are sought by employers. Greater emphasis throughout the academic community needs to be placed on interpersonal and communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, numerous attempts have been made to determine the personal characteristics recruiters consider important when evaluating applicants for interviews or permanent positions. These studies have identified a number of potentially important applicant characteristics. Among the factors most likely to influence decisions were grades (Muchinsky & Harris, 1977; Posner, 1981), communication skills (Downs & Tanner, 1982; McGovern & Ideus, 1978), and extra-curricular activities (Campion, 1978).

These studies shared similar methodological approaches. Recruiters were (1) given or (2) asked to generate a list of factors and then are requested to rate the importance of each factor to overall applicant desirability (see Shingleton & Scheetz, 1986 as an example). The factors were either rank ordered according to their importance or the mean differences among the factors were tested for statistical significance.

Unfortunately, these methods can only determine the factors that recruiters believe are important in their ratings of applicants. The ratings may or may not reflect the factors that recruiters actually use when evaluating job candidates. Decision research has shown that decision-makers are often unaware of the factors that they use when making their decisions (Nisbett, Krantz, Jepson, & Kunda, 1983; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). In addition, decision-makers are generally not aware of how often they use various factors when making decisions (Stahl & Zimmer, 1984). In Stahl's and Zimmer's study (1984), decision-makers, believing that they used a wide variety of factors in making decisions, actually focused on a small subset of the available factors. In other words, a very few factors actually determined the decisions.

Simply generating or rating a list of employment characteristics may not be appropriate for comparing the importance of these hiring characteristics across job categories or academic majors. However, little research has focused on comparisons across college majors. Instead, research has examined the importance of candidate characteristics in general, or within a particular college major. Yet different factors may be important for professions that typically are associated with different college majors.

Earlier research may be unclear, then, on the factors recruiters use when making decisions or the relative importance of these factors. An investigation into the processes and information used by recruiters when making decisions appears warranted. This study attempts to delineate the factors recruit-

ers use and to determine whether discrepancies exist between recruiter's subjective (perceived) and objective (actual) decision strategies.

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the relationship between actual and perceived factor usage by college recruiters when making candidate interview decisions.

2. To determine the relative differences in factor importance across different occupational and professional groups.

3. To determine if individual differences affect the quality of recruiter decision strategies. In this study, decision quality has been defined in terms of decision-making consistency (the extent recruiters are consistent in the way they utilize characteristics when making decisions), and their ability to discriminate among candidates. In addition, recruiters' sensitivity or awareness of the decision strategy they employed is also examined.

APPROACH

A technique called policy capturing was used to address unanswered questions regarding the recruiters' decision-making processes. The idea of using policy capturing to model how information is integrated into decision-making strategies was developed by Hoffman (1960). Policy capturing studies require participants to make a number of decisions based on a given set of information. The decisions are analyzed statistically, using multiple regression, to determine the best linear model predicting decision-maker information use.

Policy Capturing Technique with Recruiters

In recruiter decision-making research, policy capturing would generally involve several steps:

(1) A set of potential candidate profiles or descriptions that contain several relevant employment characteristics is given to recruiters.

(2) Recruiters study and evaluate the information, formulating an overall assessment. Based on this assessment, the recruiter rates each candidate's suitability for further consideration in the hiring process with their company.

(3) A multiple regression equation is then computed for each recruiter by regressing the candidate rating onto the values of the employment characteristics found in the profiles. The regression results provide the information necessary to evaluate the recruiters' decision-making strategy.

Beta weights obtained for each factor represent how much importance the recruiter places on each characteristic in the decision. The beta weights can be transformed into relative weights, similar to percentages, such that the sum of the weights totals 100 (Hoffman, 1960). The magnitude of the weights is indicative of their importance (higher value indicates higher importance) to the recruiter's decision strategy. The values of the empirically derived relative weights are then compared to subjective weight values.

Subjective weights can be obtained from the recruiter who has distributed, in a separate exercise, 100 points among the same employment characteristics used in candidate profiles. The perceived importance of each factor to the decision is reflected in the points assigned to the factor. Again higher points indicate a higher degree of importance associated with that factor. Then it is possible to compare the recruiter's actual decision strategy to the perceived strategy.

The recruiter's R^2 value, derived from the regression, is used as an indicator of rating consistency. R^2 is a measure of the amount of variance in employment decisions made by the recruiter that is attributable to characteristics in the candidate profiles. If a recruiter consistently utilizes the same factors to evaluate all candidates, the R^2 will be high (approach 1.0). If the decisionmaker utilizes the factors in an inconsistent manner, the R^2 will be low (approach 0.0). Consistent use of employment characteristics is important as consistency results in fair assessments of potential employees and is more likely to be reflected in greater accuracy.

Individual Differences and Rater Strategies

Individual differences may exist among recruiters that could affect the relationship between perceived and actual factor usage. More experienced, well trained, or knowledgeable recruiters may be more aware of their factor usage than inexperienced recruiters. Knowledgeable or experienced recruiters may also have more sophisticated and complex decision making strategies and may use a larger number of factors when making decisions than more inexperienced recruiters.

A psychological factor that may influence the quality of recruiter decisions and factor usage is cognitive complexity. Cognitive complexity has been defined as the ability to differen-

tiate between and to distinguish within (also referred to as articulation) the personality characteristics of other people (Bieri, Atkins, Briar, Leaman, Miller, & Tripodi, 1966). Individuals who make few distinctions between characteristics will use only a few characteristics. These same individuals will also not articulate a wide range of difference within each characteristic. For these reasons, these people are classified as cognitively simple. They perceive others using a little information and make few distinctions among them.

In contrast, individuals who use many pieces of information, make distinctions between available information, and can articulate to a high degree within each characteristic are described as cognitively complex (Scott, 1969; Vannoy, 1965). A cognitively complex person is one who possesses the ability to perceive behavior in a multidimensional manner (Schneier, 1977). They tend to use more characteristics and are more willing to make distinctions among them.

Another psychological factor that could influence decision quality is self-awareness. It seems logical to suggest that individuals who possess high self-awareness may be more accurate in their assessment of their decision-making strategy. They may also be more careful with the way in which they combine factors when making a decision.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruiters from various public and private sector institutions who interviewed college students at Michigan State University. Only recruiters screening accounting, computer science, electrical engineering, selected business (marketing, general business, and merchandising), social sciences, including communications, and arts and letters majors were invited to participate. A total of 360 recruiters were given surveys and candidate profiles. Of these, 151 returned completed surveys (42% response rate). The recruiters were asked to participate in the study to assist the Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI) in its research on recruitment decisions. Recruiters were offered individual decision strategy feedback and a final research report as an incentive.

Procedure

Recruiters responded to a series of questionnaire measures assessing individual background and psychological characteristics, made assessments on a set of 40 hypothetical job candidates, and answered questions about their perceived use of candidate information. Recruiters were asked individually to

participate. They returned their responses in pre-addressed envelopes sent directly to the CERI.

Individual Difference Measures

Demographics. Recruiters were asked open-ended questions regarding how frequently they had served as a recruiter on college campuses, how many years of experience they had as a recruiter, how frequently they had served as an interviewer for advanced job candidates (those beyond entry level), how many years of work experience they had in their professional specialty, and how many hours of special instruction they had in recruiting and/or interviewing.

Cognitive Complexity. Recruiters were asked to list up to 18 factors that they would ideally like to see when reviewing candidates for employment. They were also asked to rate the importance of each factor they listed from 1 (slightly important) to 5 (extremely important, must know). The number of factors listed was taken as a measure of their ability to articulate factors they considered important. The standard deviation of the importance ratings for each characteristic was used as a measure of the recruiter's ability to differentiate among the factors they generated. The cognitive complexity score was computed by multiplying the articulation and differentiation measures.

Self Awareness. An eleven item scale adapted from Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) was used to measure recruiter self-awareness.

Policy Capturing

Candidate profiles. After a thorough review of the literature, eight of the most frequently identified employment characteristics for new employees were selected to generate the candidate profiles. Each of these characteristics was considered to be highly important: (1) major grade point average (GPA); (2) non-major GPA; (3 & 4) course content consisting of two measures--the number of course hours the candidate completed within or related to his/her major and the number of course hours completed outside the major; (5) amount of relevant work experience--the number of months the candidate had worked in his/her field; (6) participation in extra-curricular activities and any offices held in these activities; (7) amount of education financed-- a percentage measure of how much of the candidate's education was personally financed; and (7)communication skills--a rating of the candidate's communication ability.

All these characteristics, with the exception of communication skills, may be found on the typical undergraduate resume. No quantifiable measure of communication skills currently exists though many respondents commented on their survey that they

wished one did. An artificial rating was created for the study. Participants were told that each candidate was interviewed and tested by a pre-employment counselor who assigned the candidate a rating for communication abilities.

Fictional candidate names, 20 male and 20 female, were generated for the forty hypothetical applicant profiles. Values for the designated characteristics were randomly assigned to each profile to avoid correlated profiles. The forty uncorrelated profiles were designed to ensure interpretable beta weights (i.e. low common variance and low standard errors).

Decisions. Participants were asked to evaluate the set of potential interview candidates. They were given the background information about each potential candidate as contained in the profile. For simplicity, all applicants reviewed by a recruiter were from the same college major. After examining each profile, the recruiter was asked to indicate the suitability of each applicant for an interview from 1 (unsuitable-not worth interviewing) to 5 (exceptionally suitable-definite interview prospect).

Recruiter decision strategies were then computed by regressing overall ratings for the candidates onto the characteristics composing the candidate profiles. Individual recruiter regression equations were based on all forty decisions.

Self Reported Strategy Attributes. Recruiters were then asked about the manner in which they used the information provided in the profiles. They were asked the extent to which they made consistent ratings, the extent to which they found differences in the suitability among the applicants, and the extent to which they felt that they were aware of the factors that were important to their decisions.

Reported Factor Importance. Recruiters were also asked for subjective impression of how they used the candidate information. Each recruiter distributed 100 points among the factors to obtain the subjective measure. The distribution of points indicated the importance of each factor to the recruiter's decision.

Rating Quality. Several outcomes representing decision processes were assessed. Consistency was measured by the R^2 from each recruiter's decision model. Recruiters who were consistent in their pattern of factor utilization would have high R^2 values relative to recruiters who used different factors across candidates.

Recruiter discrimination among candidates was measured by recruiter standard deviations across the forty decisions. Larger standard deviations were indicative of greater discrimina-

tion across candidates, whereas small standard deviations were indicative of an inability to distinguish among candidates.

Recruiter strategy (i.e., factor importance) was assessed by converting statistical beta weights to relative weights using Hoffman's (1960) formula: [((beta X r)/R^2)100]. A profile of objective factor importance was created for each participant that could be compared with the recruiter's subjective estimates.

Recruiters' pattern sensitivity to their strategies was provided by correlating the objective and subjective weight values and converting the correlation to a z score. High values indicated recruiters who could correctly rank order their factor utilization strategy in the subjective estimates based on their objective ranking while low values suggested that the individual was unaware of the rank order.

Level sensitivity indicated the recruiters' sensitivity to the absolute magnitude of degree of importance placed on each characteristic. It was computed by taking the sum of the squares of the differences between the subjective and objective factor values. High values indicated a lack of awareness as to the absolute importance of the characteristics.

RESULTS

The recruiters had a mean of 4.7 years of recruiting experience, ranging from an average 3 years for social science/ liberal arts recruiters to 6 years for recruiters seeking electrical engineers. On average, participants have served as recruiters on college campuses 24 times. Electrical engineering and accounting recruiters had spent more time on campus than other types of recruiters. Electrical engineering and accounting recruiters were also more likely to be involved in recruiting for advanced positions than the other recruiters (41 and 44 times respectively, as compared to an average 31 times). The average number of years of work experience in the recruiter's professional specialty was 11.5 years. The least amount of professional experience was reported by social social science/liberal arts recruiters at 8.4 years. Recruiters reported receiving about 50 hours of interviewing training. However, this statistic was strongly influenced by the 112 hour (14 days) and 89 hour (11 days) averages reported by social sciences/ liberal arts and computer science recruiters, respectively. The remaining recruiters averaged about 30 hours or two and one-half days of training. Seventy-five percent of the recruiters in this study were male.

The first set of questions posed by this study addressed the decision making strategies actually used by recruiters. As can be seen in the far right column of Table 1 (Overall Summary)

recruiters relied largely on major GPA and communications skills (with relative weights of 42.05 and 29.07, respectively) to determine candidate selections. After these two factors, there was a large drop in factor utilization. The next factors commonly used by recruiters were non-major GPA and extra curricular activities (each with a relative weight of 8.03), followed by work experience and amount of education financed (relative weight 6.67 and 4.26, respectively).

The two factors that were used least by recruiters were sex and course content. The course content finding contrasts to the findings in other studies that have reported a high importance of course content to recruiter decisions (Gulezian, 1978). The course content and major GPA factors were correlated ($r = .50$), however. This correlation may mask the true relation of course content to the recruiter's overall decision.

Although six characteristics played relatively minor roles in recruiters' decisions, these factors may be used to rank order recruits of similar quality later in the hiring process. Nevertheless, for candidates to pass through the 'first cut'--the review of the resume-- students would need to have good major GPA's and to demonstrate sound communication skills.

Some caution should be taken when generalizing from these results. While recruiters generally tended to rely on major GPA and communication skills, large differences did occur in decision strategies among individual recruiters. Large standard deviations for all the candidate employment characteristics, as shown in Table 1, indicate a wide variation in factor usage.

Gender

Special attention was given to the influence of gender in the decision process. Both the gender of the applicant and the gender of the recruiter were estimated. Public concerns over the recruitment and advancement of women, plus the legal ramifications of the hiring process, have raised employers' sensitivity to the treatment of women. The small relative weight for sex indicated that sexual discrimination was not a substantial problem among recruiters (relative weights range from 1.2 to 2.14 across majors in Table 1). Large standard deviations for sex in the major categories suggested, however, that some recruiters show a tendency to prefer one sex over the other.

When pursuing the effect of gender a little further, only a few important relationships were found. An examination of the relationship between recruiter's sex and the sex of the applicant broken down by major found a statistically significant correlation within accounting. Women recruiters rated women applicants higher than men ($r=.36$, $p<.05$). In computer science and business, the correlations (insignificant) suggested that male

recruiters had a tendency to rate male applicants higher. All other comparisions using the two gender variables failed to produce any other important relationships.

These results are encouraging in that gender did not appear to influence the "first cut" decisions made by recruiters. This encouragement is magnified when one considers that 75% of the recruiters were men; men in this sample at least were not using gender as an interviewing selection characteristic. The interpretation of these results is hampered somewhat by the relatively small number of women recruiters. Women comprise 50% of the participants in social science/ liberal arts, but only 28% in the traditionally male fields (accounting, business, and computer science). Interestingly, in engineering, where only 18% of the recruiters were women, the use of gender was nearly identical between men and women recruiters. Because these findings indicate an insignificant role for gender, it will not be considered in subsequent analyses.

College Major

Do differences exist among recruiters when factor usage is considered by college major? Large differences were found in factor usage across major groups (Table 1). Major GPA and communication skills were consistently the most important characteristics for recruiters across all major groups. The relative weights of these two factors, however, varied across major groups. Recruiters in the fields of accounting and computer science placed a much higher emphasis on major GPA. In comparison, electrical engineering recruiters had more of a balance between major GPA and communication skills, although GPA was still nearly twice as important. Recruiters interested in business and social sciences/ liberal arts majors placed much more emphasis on communication skills than on grade point average.

After considering major GPA and communication skills, recruiters may weigh a few other factors. In accounting, recruiters used non-major GPA (weight 13.20) as a third distinguishing characteristic. Interview selection for accounting was largely driven by grade point average considerations--77% of the decision was weighted toward grades. Hardly any emphasis was given to the prior work experiences accounting majors may have had. This low weight may be attributed to CPA firms who may want to train new hires in the firm's techniques, making previous experience of little value if the techniques vary.

Computer science majors faced a similar situation where recruiters considered non-major GPA third (weight 8.33)--making the total grade component 76% of the decision. Work experience, however, was nearly as important as non-major GPA.

Recruiters in business and social sciences/liberal arts utilized a more balanced decision making strategy. Extra-curricular activities were nearly as important to social sciences recruiters as major grade point average. The remaining characteristics were not employed to any great extent. For business, work experience accounted for nearly 10% of the decision criteria. Only in business did financing one's education play a role in the selection process. The weight of 8.53 for this characteristic ranged from 2 to 8 times higher than in the other academic major groups. Social and personal interaction skills appeared important employment characteristics when used by recruiters in non-technical areas.

Recruiters seeking electrical engineers also used multiple characterisitcs to rate candidates. While non-major GPA received a weight of 7.84, raising the total GPA weight to 54.10, extra-curricular activities were slightly more important to the decision. Interestingly, work experience was not widely used in the decision process. Results of the early socialization study showed that Michigan State University engineering students varied in their involvement in work-related experiences: some had no experience and others had an extensive amount of work experience (Major, McKellin and Kozlowski, 1988). The advantage of work-related experiences was seen in better adjustment to the work environment by new employees. The confusion presented by these different findings suggests that a closer examination of how pre-graduation work experiences influence recruiters' and employers' decision-making may be appropriate.

Among the natural and physical science recruiters, electrical engineering recruiters placed the greatest degree of emphasis on communication skills. This finding may be particularly revealing to engineers. Often the emphasis in technical programs is on the quantitative skills, not writing and oral presentations. As a result, communication skills are not developed adequately. Preliminary results from a career development study show that many graduates, particularly engineers, believed their undergraduate program was ineffective in developing communication skills necessary for success in their careers (Gardner, Chao, and Lien, 1988). Also in the socialization study, engineers employed fewer orientation devices than management graduates, more often relying on their technical skills rather than interpersonal relationships. An obvious message to prospective engineers would be not to neglect the development of their communication skills seriously.

Reported Versus Actual Factor Usage

The discrepancies between the factors recruiters reported using and the factors they actually used when making interview/hiring decisions are reported in this section. As can be seen in Table 2, discrepancies were found between reported and actual

factor usage. Recruiters reported that they believed they were using a wide variety of factors with relatively equal weights when making their decisions. The objective scores (how they actually made their decisions) indicated, however, that they primarily relied on major GPA and communication skills when making these decisions. Other potentially relevant factors were essentially ignored.

Table 3 provides actual and reported weights for the factors for each college major. Relatively small differences existed in how recruiters in the various majors perceived they were using the information. Within each major recruiters believed that they were using a number of factors with relatively equal weights when making decisions across all major groups.

Within each major group, the direction of the actual weights for the factors generally reflected the weights given to what they thought they were using. For example, recruiters in accounting and computer science reported placing a higher emphasis on major GPA and less, but evenly distributed, emphasis on the other factors. This was actually the case. However, the magnitude of the actual difference in use of major GPA relative to the other factors was far greater than the reported difference.

Recruiters likely to have the best match between what they reported using and what actually used were from business. The exception was for communication skills, where the recruiters may have been taking advantage of a quantifiable measure of communication ability. In the remaining majors, recruiters were found to rely on grades much more than they believed they were. The heavy reliance confirms what many placement officials have feared: the over utilization of grade point average in screening decisions.

Recruiter Differences

The relationships among individual recruiter differences and rating quality (strategy awareness, consistency, and discrimination) were explored. Strategy awareness was measured by recruiter sensitivity to the relationships among the factors they used (Pattern Sensitivity) and the magnitude of the differences between the actual and reported factor usage (Level Sensitivity). Recruiter consistency corresponded to the recruiters' ability to use factors in a fair and reliable manner across applicants. Discrimination relates to recruiter ability to distinguish among candidates of different quality.

Very few significant relationships among recruiter experience and the rating quality indices were found (Table 4). There was a small significant relationship between the number of college recruiting trips made and the ability to discriminate

among candidates. This relationship reasonably suggested that as recruiters gain more experience, they become more sensitive to differences among candidates.

Small and statistically significant negative relationships were found between (1) the amount of training recruiters reported and discrimination and (2) the amount of training and consistency. These findings were rather perplexing. They seemed to indicate that recruiters who had received more training were less likely to be consistent in factor usage and less sensitive to differences among candidates. A possible explanation might be that inexperienced or relatively poor recruiters were sent to training classes, while experienced or relatively good recruiters may not spend much time in training classes.

The study also examined the relationships among the recruiters' perceived self-awareness and rating quality. No significant correlations among reported self-awareness and rating quality were found (Table 5). There was no relationship between the extent to which recruiters believed that they were self-aware and actual awareness of decision-making strategy, consistency in factor usage or discrimination among recruits.

Another issue was the relationship between cognitive complexity and rating quality. Cognitive Complexity was defined as recruiters' ability to articulate a large number of candidate factors, and their ability to differentiate among those factors. An overall composite measure of complexity was derived by multiplying the articulation and differentiation scores. No significant relationships among cognitive complexity and strategy awareness or decision quality were found (Table 5). This result is very surprising given our a priori expectations. However, it does not appear that the ability to consider factors important to recruiting has any relationship with rating fairness and discrimination.

Strategy Attributes and Decision Quality

The relationships among reported strategy attributes (Consistency, Awareness, and Differentiation) and decision quality were examined. Actual discrimination correlated significantly with perceived consistency (Table 7). A large correlation also existed between perceived discrimination and actual discrimination. A significant relationship also existed between perceived awareness and discrimination. These results suggest that recruiters appear to be able to observe the extent to which they discriminate or distinguish among candidates.

DISCUSSION

Recruiters appear to be no different than other types of decision makers. Consistent with earlier research, recruiters perceive themselves using a variety of information; yet they use only a few selected pieces in their actual decision process. While employers continue to assert they are interested in the "total" person, placement officials continue to express concern that recruiters are focusing on fewer factors, usually only grades, when making pre-screening selections (Stein, et al 1986).

The policy capturing results from this sample of recruiters tended to confirm placement officials' fears. Recruiters relied on a restricted subset of applicant characteristics when making their interviewing decisions. Across all academic major groups, grade point average and communication skills consistently ranked at the top, even though the emphasis between these two characteristics differed according to major.

A generalization of these results to real recruiting situations is somewhat difficult. In a research situation there is no cost associated with making an error. Thus the recruiter may act differently than in an actual recruiting situation. In addition the profiles are unusual. For example, the communication measure is contrived. In the absence of a communication variable, the results would change. The communication weight could be equally distributed over the other characteristics. More likely, however, much of the weight value would be shifted toward grade point average. Thus, at the "first cut" an enormous amount of attention appears to be given to grades.

Students are quick to adjust their behavior in response to cues from recruiters and employers concerning employability. Grades are critical for most students before they walk on campus. Many of the desired programs, such as engineering, business and education, have entrance requirements that hinge on grade point average. Students will plan their academic program to ensure admittance to a particular major and subsequently employment in that field. Students could take fewer courses per term, select low risk classes, thus reducing exposure to rigorous fields of study, and become less involved in extra-curricular activities. The loss of academic breadth and social experience would be unfortunate for these factors may play an important role in employment decisions after the first cut and certainly later in one's career.

For the student facing a job search, this effort needs to move beyond the traditional steps. Besides sending resumes to employers and signing up for interviews at the placement office, students should tie their educational program and personal skills to the search through techniques such as networking. Networking, for example, allows an individual to emphasize skills, par-

ticularly communication skills, that do not stand out on a resume. Even engineers and other high demand majors should utilize this technique. There will be times in one's career when sending out resumes and grade point average will not capture the attention of a potential employer.

At this point, however, these results may be more useful for recruiters and their organizations. One primary function of recruiters is to screen potential job applicants for employment. If a recruiter bases these decisions on a narrow set of factors, the effect is to limit the applicant pool. Thus, management which may be publicly expressing the need for well-rounded applicants may be actually getting very narrow employees. These results do not necessarily suggest that screening strategies are poorly articulated. Nevertheless recruiters and management may want to evaluate current recruiting programs to identify where improvements or adjustments can be made.

Two areas that management may want to consider for evaluation are the selection and training of recruiters. Attention can be focused on these three questions:

1. On what basis are recruiters selected?

2. What training do recruiters receive?

3. To what extent are recruiters focused on specific job skills versus left on their own to define the position?

If recruiting is regarded as a chore (a situation that good, knowledgeable people try to avoid), if there is inadequate preparation, and if job requirements are absent or ill defined, recruiters will default to a seemingly objective indicator--grades--even if grades are poor criteria for screening decisions.

The absence of gender as a significant decision variable has to be encouraging, even if broad generalizations cannot be made from this study. After more than a decade of concern, it appears that women can be evaluated for employment on their own merits rather than their sex. Complacency cannot become established because there were pockets of discrimination both toward and against women in this sample. In other regions of the country, gender may continue to play a role in initial job screenings. Efforts need to be made to educate all participants in the job search process to the rich rewards of a diverse work force.

The results of this study call into question previous research addressing the factors recruiters consider important when evaluating candidates. Actually, the recruiting process may be a set of small steps--pre-screening, on-campus interviews, and post-campus interviews for example--that utilize different

information. This distinction is not made in most studies. Much of the research has focused on the face-to-face interview and the construction of the resume (appearance and content). Results from later steps often get carried back to an earlier step where misinterpretation may occur. Future research needs to take a more holistic approach, investigating how candidate information is used and transferred through the entire process. The beneficiaries of such research would be all participants of the interview process who would gain a greater awareness of how information is used in employment decisions.

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Table 1. Factor Importance by Major[1]

Emp. Char.	MAJOR: Accounting	Soc.Sci./ Lib. Arts	Computer Science	Elect. Engin.	Business	OVERALL SUMMARY
Sex	1.93 (3.22)[2]	2.14 (2.66)	2.09 (2.35)	1.51 (2.18)	1.12 (2.32)	1.67 (2.60)
Major GPA	64.13 (23.12)	21.94 (26.67)	67.23 (29.05)	46.26 (29.12)	20.07 (20.82)	42.05 (31.66)
Non Major GPA	13.20 (13.09)	4.47 (10.60)	8.33 (9.39)	7.84 (10.04)	5.72 (8.35)	8.03 (10.77)
Course Content	-1.54 (2.21)	.01 (2.02)	-1.86 (1.96)	.26 (3.66)	2.51 (4.90)	.16 (3.73)
Work Experience	2.63 (4.65)	6.64 (8.32)	8.11 (15.74)	6.81 (10.79)	9.54 (15.05)	6.67 (11.45)
Communication Skills	14.25 (18.97)	41.42 (32.17)	11.10 (25.12)	25.97 (29.85)	45.28 (32.48)	29.07 (31.06)
Extra Curricular Activities	4.17 (4.42)	18.44 (25.08)	2.57 (3.37)	8.02 (14.07)	7.22 (10.83)	8.03 (14.32)
Percent Education Financed	1.11 (1.97)	4.81 (6.68)	2.43 (3.22)	3.28 (8.08)	8.53 (14.53)	4.26 (9.21)

[1]Figures in the table represent relative weights (out of 100).
[2]Numbers in parentheses represent relative weight standard deviations.

Table 2. Reported vs. Actual Factor Usage[1].

Factor	Reported[2] Usage	Actual Usage
Major GPA	20.61 (10.03)[3]	42.55 (32.23)
Non-Major GPA	12.06 (7.87)	8.91 (12.35)
Course Content	8.74 (8.38)	.17 (3.78)
Work Experience	14.91 (13.61)	6.67 (11.59)
Communication Skills	21.37 (10.64)	29.46 (31.34)
Extra Curricular Activities	13.01 (10.04)	7.94 (14.94)
Percent Education Financed	10.20 (12.29)	4.31 (9.21)

[1]All differences between means within factor significant at $p < .01$
[2]Figures in the table represent relative weights (out of 100)
[3]Numbers in parentheses represent relative weight standard deviations.

Table 3. Factor Importance by Major[1]

Factor	Accounting		Soc.Sci./ Lib. Arts		Computer Science		Elect. Engin.		Business	
	A[2,3]	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R
Major GPA	63.50/26.77 (24.71)	(9.04)	22.78/12.90 (27.44)	(9.24)	68.75/26.31 (29.48)	(8.57)	47.10/20.15 (29.47)	(8.84)	20.61/18.03 (21.98)	(8.82)
Non Major GPA	15.73/17.44 (16.98)	(7.60)	4.84/8.31 (11.15)	(7.33)	8.93/15.38 (9.42)	(8.55)	8.26/10.87 (10.44)	(6.04)	6.02/9.45 (8.61)	(7.08)
Course Content	-1.55/8.06 (2.30)	(8.52)	-.02/5.71 (2.06)	(6.68)	-1.92/11.81 (2.00)	(7.75)	.29/11.39 (3.74)	(9.52)	2.51/7.26 (4.96)	(7.42)
Work Exp.	2.64/12.15 (4.89)	(21.16)	6.67/15.50 (8.73)	(10.06)	8.07/15.19 (15.90)	(9.34)	6.78/17.13 (10.74)	(12.24)	9.62/14.61 (15.15)	(9.33)
Comm. Skills	14.73/18.15 (19.86)	(6.70)	42.21/23.15 (32.42)	(12.92)	11.19/15.81 (25.31)	(9.48)	26.26/20.05 (30.04)	(8.12)	45.27/26.84 (26.84)	(12.38)
Extra Curr. Act.	3.93/11.00 (4.48)	(5.15)	18.57/21.04 (25.41)	(17.69)	2.35/7.81 (3.63)	(5.92)	7.89/11.62 (14.39)	(7.01)	7.24/13.34 (10.85)	(8.16)
% Ed. Fin.	1.02/9.82 (1.76)	(20.92)	4.93/13.42 (6.80)	(11.00)	2.59/7.69 (3.54)	(5.15)	3.43/9.31 (8.30)	(7.80)	8.47/10.47 (14.38)	(7.91)

[1]Figures in the table represent relative weights (out of 100).
[2]Actual and Reported relative weights.
[3]Numbers in parentheses represent actual and reported weight standard deviations.

Table 4. The Relationships among Recruiter Experience and Actual Awarenes of Strategy Usage.

Recruiter Experience Measure	Pattern Sensitivity	Level Sensitivity	Discrim-ination	Consis-tency
Number of College Recruiting Trips	.13	-.07	.16*	.03
Years College Recruiter	.07	.00	.11	.07
Number of Advanced Position Interviews	-.05	.01	.17*	-.01
Years Work Experience in Professional Specialty	-.03	.06	.04	.06
Hours Recruiting Training Received	.01	.01	-.18*	-.21**

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 5. The Relationships among Reported Self-Awareness and Actual Awareness of Strategy Usage.

Self-Awareness Measure	Pattern Sensitivity	Level Sensitivity	Discrim-ination	Consis-tency
General Intro-spection	.02	.06	.02	-.08
Awareness of Self	.00	-.01	-.04	-.10
Inner Feelings	.04	-.05	.03	-.05
Analytic Orientation	-.13	.11	.09	-.06
Overall Self Awareness	-.02	.05	.02	-.13

**p < .01, two-tailed.

Table 6. The Relationships Among Cognitive Complexity and Rating Quality.

Cognitive Complexity Measure	Pattern Sensitivity	Level Sensitivity	Discrim-ination	Consis-tency
Artic-ulation	.00	.03	-.08	-.06
Differen-tiation	-.04	.00	.05	.12
Complexity	.09	-.01	-.03	.02

**p < .01, two-tailed.

Table 7. The Relationships among Reported Strategy-Awareness and Actual Awareness of Strategy Usage.

Self-Report Measure	Pattern Sensitivity	Level Sensitivity	Discrim-ination	Consis-tency
Consis-tency	.11	.03	.17*	-.02
Discrim-ination	-.02	.11	.52**	.07
Awareness	.11	.03	.30**	.04

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.